

**CHRISTIANITY AND
EMANCIPATION, OR, THE
TEACHINGS AND THE INFLUENCE
OF THE BIBLE AGAINST SLAVERY**

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JOSEPH P. THOMPSON

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CHRISTIANITY AND EMANCIPATION;

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THE TEACHINGS AND THE INFLUENCE

OF THE

BIBLE AGAINST SLAVERY.

BY

JOSEPH P. THOMPSON,

PASTOR OF THE BROADWAY TABERNACLE CHURCH.

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1863.

NEW YORK, May 1st, 1868.

REV. JOS. P. THOMPSON, D. D.,

DEAR SIR,—Having listened with much interest to your sermon on the influence of the Christian religion on the abolition of slavery, and regarding the views you then presented as of vital importance to the church and nation at the present time, we request a copy of the discourse for publication, and remain

Your friends,

SETH B. HUNT,	CHARLES ABERNETHY,
WM. HENRY SMITH,	L. M. BATES,
WM. G. LAMBERT,	SAMUEL HOLMES,
ADON SMITH,	CHAS. S. SMITH.

NEW YORK, May 4th, 1868.

GENTLEMEN,—I thank you for your friendly expressions concerning my Fast-Day Sermon. If its argument, the result of years of patient study, will at all contribute to elucidate the teaching, and vindicate the honor, of the sacred Scriptures in respect to the system of slavery, it is quite at your disposal.

With high regard,

Yours truly,

JOS. P. THOMPSON.

MESSES. SETH B. HUNT,
WM. H. SMITH, and others.

CHRISTIANITY AND EMANCIPATION.

I.

A SLANDER UPON THE GOSPEL.

A MONSTROUS libel upon Christianity has lately appeared from the pen of the Professor of History in the University of Ghent. It is the most shocking scandal that the Deism of this age, or of any age, has invented against the Bible. There is nothing more malignant in Voltaire; and, though it is couched in decent phrase, there is scarce anything more blasphemous in Thomas Paine. It is contained in half-a-dozen lines, imbedded in a work of several octavo volumes, entitled, "Studies upon the History of Humanity;" and may be found in the chapter on the enfranchisement of serfs, in the volume upon "Feudalism and the Church."* Shall I then reproduce it in the English tongue, and give it currency in a nation that its author could not reach? Alas, it is already current wherever modern Deism assails the divine origin of the Bible; it has found utterance in lyceums and conventions, in newspapers and magazines, as the favorite, because the most effective, weapon of modern infidelity. And yet I shudder to write these impious

* *La Féodalité et L'Eglise*, par F. Laurent. *Etudes sur L'Histoire de L'Humanité* Tome VII., pp. 596 and 618. Paris, E. Jung-Treuttel.

words:—"To have done anything," says Laurent, "toward the enfranchisement of the servile classes, the Church had need of a living sentiment of liberty. But Christianity never had that sentiment: it accepted slavery by consecrating it with its authority. Yes, Christianity did more than accept slavery; it saw in it a Divine institution. It is not enough to say that Christianity does not condemn slavery; it would be more true to say that it sanctifies it."*

This horrible calumny against Christianity is used by its author to glorify the French Revolution of 1789, as an intervention of God in behalf of humanity, to inaugurate liberty and equality in spite of the church. Theodore Parker charged upon the Bible the same infamous complicity with slavery, and sneered at the idea of a supernatural revelation in the Scriptures.† Such a Bible was to him a Fetish. "The divine statutes in the

* The same sentiment is expressed by Patrice Larroque, in his treatise "*de l'Esclavage chez les Nations Chrétiennes*," p. 13. "Not only have the books of the New Testament not one solitary text against slavery, but all that they say about slavery is favorable to its principle. And it must not be forgotten, that Christianity, starting from the books of the Old Testament, declares those to have been revealed and inspired by the Holy Spirit, as well as the books of the New Testament. But slavery finds its justification in express utterances of the Old Testament."

† Theodore Parker's "Experience as a Minister," pp. 64 and 143. Mr. Parker takes these sentiments to represent the current views of "Bible-worshippers," as he designates believers in the inspiration of the Scriptures. He does not, however, deny or disprove the interpretation of the Bible which he imputes to such persons; but assuming that the Old Testament does sanction slavery, he makes this a reason for rejecting its divine inspiration. Bishop Colenso reasons in the same way against the inspiration of the Pentateuch. He first misinterprets the Hebrew text, and having charged upon it the most extravagant errors and immoralities, he then refuses to believe that his *imaginary* Bible comes from God—a conclusion in which we quite agree.

Old Testament admitted the principle that man might own a man as well as a garden or an ox. Moses and the prophets were on the side of slavery ; and neither Paul of Tarsus nor Jesus of Nazareth uttered a direct word against it, the slaveholder finds the chief argument for his ownership of men, in texts from the authentic Word of God." Mr. Parker had the popular reputation of knowing many languages : he ought to have known Hebrew better than to have conceded that the Old Testament sanctions or in any sense admits the ownership of man in man. But the Deist who charges the Bible with sanctioning slavery, knows well that this is the most odious and damaging accusation that he could bring against a book claiming to have come from God ; that in an enlightened age,—an age when moral convictions and philanthropic sympathies have combined to exterminate slavery as a sin and a curse—nothing could more effectually destroy all respect for the Bible, or disprove its divine origin, than the representation that it sanctions the owning of human beings. This imputation is " a blow aimed at all that good men hold most sacred. It seeks to undermine the very foundations of national morality and break the spring of all public and private virtue. It attacks Christianity in its central principle and vital essence. It daringly assaults the morality of the Bible, and seeks to destroy forever its authority by making it an accomplice in the perpetuation of the most gigantic crimes."*

* London Daily News.

II.

SLAVERY IN THE TIME OF CHRIST.

TEST this charge of complicity with slavery by your own moral sense. When Christ appeared, slavery was universal in the Roman empire. What the system was, we know from its laws that have come down to us, and from glimpses of Roman life and manners in the classic writers. The Romans perfected the system of legalized chattelism. Their laws reduced the slave to the level of cattle. "Slaves were held *pro nullis, pro mortuis, pro quadrupedibus*. They were not entitled to the rights and considerations of matrimony. They could be sold, transferred, pawned as goods or personal estate, for goods they were, and as such they were esteemed. They might be tortured for evidence, punished at the discretion of their lord, and even put to death by his authority.*" Scourges loaded with lead, or furnished with prongs, the yoke, the brand, the pincers, the rack, were common instruments of torture; and there were torturers by profession, to whom masters sometimes sent their slaves for the refinements of cruelty. Many a trifling offence was punished by crucifixion. Augustus ordered his steward to be crucified on the mast of his ship for having killed and eaten a game quail prized by the emperor.† Field hands were commonly purchased

* Taylor on Civil Law, in Cooper's *Justinian*, p. 411.

† Bib. Repository, Vol. VI., pp. 422, 423. Also, Plutarch Apophth. VI., 773.

in the slave market, at an age capable of labor; and "when through age or infirmity they had become incapable of working, they were again sent with other refuse to the market. They were often chained to their work in the field; and an underground cellar, for the imprisonment of slaves by night, was a necessary part of the farm buildings on a large plantation. The whole system was pervaded by the unscrupulous spirit characteristic of the power of capital. Slaves and cattle were placed on the same level. The slave and the ox were fed properly so long as they could work, because it would not have been good economy to let them starve; and they were sold like a worn-out plough-share when they became unable to work, because it would not have been good economy to maintain them longer."*

* Mommsen's *History of Rome*, Vol. II., p. 368. Prof. Döllinger, of Munich, a scholar of wide research, says, "The slave in Rome was a chattel and a possession, had no individuality or 'caput;' whatever he earned belonged to his master, and he might be made a present of, lent, pawned, or exchanged. His union with a wife was no marriage, that is, was devoid of all its privileges and effects, and only a *contubernium* or cohabitation. A master might torture or kill his slave at will; there was no one to prevent his doing so, or to bring him to account. The modes of torture and punishment were various and cruel, and the ordinary punishment of death was crucifixion. One cruel infliction frequently resorted to for female slaves was chaining to a block of wood, which served the poor sufferer for a seat, and which she had to drag about with her day and night. Slaves in the country, who had to till the ground, were chained by the foot, and kept at night in an *ergastulum*, or underground room. The Roman law inflicted the punishment of death for killing a plough-ox, while the murderer of a slave was called to no account whatever.

"It is in vain one looks for anything like common human feeling in the Roman slave-law of republican times, and that of the earlier empire. The breaking up of slave families was entirely in the hands of the merchant or the owner; husband might be separated from wife, and mother from children, all dispersed and sold off into the houses of strangers and to foreign towns. Slavery is equivalent to death in the eye of the civil law, which does not admit the existence of a slave; which